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ABSTRACT

A questionnaire to identify the time to adjust, sources of stress, and importance of services was completed by 241 residents (68 percent), median age 70 years, of a continuing care retirement community (CCRC). The answers to these questions provided valuable information; however, an equally important finding was the variability of responses associated with age and gender. Most residents (59 percent), reported that they required 30 days or less to adjust to the CCRC, and 12 percent indicated that they required more than 6 months. For women, a positive correlation emerged between the number of frustrations during the move and their adjustment time. Forty-one percent of the CCRC residents indicated that the greatest stressor relating to the move was "preparing for the move," with younger women and older men reporting the greatest stress. Age of the resident was positively correlated with importance of the dining room and maid service, and negatively correlated with the value of the chapel. Both library and chapel were more important to women than to men. (Author/TE)

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Age and Gender as Relocation Stress Variables of the Elderly

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Abstract

A questionnaire to identify the time to adjust, sources of stress, and importance of services was completed by 241 residents (68%), median age 70 years, of a Continuing Care Retirement Community (CCRC). The answers to these questions provided valuable information; however, an equally important finding was the variability of responses associated with age and gender. Most residents (59%), reported it took 30 days or less to adjust to the CCRC, and 12% indicated it took more than six months. For women there was a positive correlation between the number of frustrations in connection with the move and the time it took them to adjust. Forty-one percent of the CCRC residents indicated the greatest stressor relating to the move was "preparing for the move," with younger women and older men reporting the greatest stress. Age of the resident was positively correlated with importance of the dining room and maid service; age was negatively correlated with the value of the chapel. Both the library and chapel were more important to women than men.

Age and Gender as Relocation Stress Variables of the Elderly

Samuel W. Cochran, Natalie K. Wright, and Mary Opal Wolanin

SWPA Conference - April 14, 1989

When a large group of retired military officers, their spouses and widows, moved to a new beautifully appointed continuing care retirement community, they presented a unique opportunity for study during the year following their actual move-in. These individuals were required to be ambulatory, a retired officer and at least age 62, or a widow of a retired officer. This group of subjects differed from those of many other studies in that these individuals moved every two to four years during their military career, with some residents reporting as high as 36 different addresses in their lifetime. The choice to move to this retirement community was entirely voluntary, but it was implicitly understood that this was likely their final move.

Literature Review

A review of the relocation-related literature was scant and contradictory. The literature began with studies of stress induced in the impaired elderly as

the result of involuntary relocation and moved to studies of stress induced in the voluntary relocation of the well elderly. Not all of the subjects found relocation to be a negative experience. Implicated in nearly every study, though, was stress in one form or the other. No study, however, attempted to measure self-perceived stress by voluntary movers or report what things were most stressful about the move.

Importance of Study

Using a questionnaire designed for older adults, this study examined the relationship between the relocation of older individuals and their self-perception of adjustment and stress. Specifically, the residents reported the length of time it took them to adjust to their new home in a retirement community and which aspect of the move they perceived as most stressful. Residents also reported the degree of importance they placed on the services offered by the facility.

Subjects

Two-hundred-forty-one residents (68%) of this retirement facility participated in this study. These residents had a median age of 70 years and 2 months,

with the interquartile range extending from age 67 years and 11 months through 72 years and 7 months, a period of approximately five years. In addition to similarity in chronological age, the residents were similar in terms of financial resources and earned academic degrees. The ratio of women to men was 6 to 5.

Apparatus

Responses from the residents were written on a 125-item, 10-page Resident Survey Form which was part of management's periodic procedure for determining the degree of resident satisfaction with the services and amenities that were provided. Responses to only 23 of the 125 items contained in the survey were used in this study.

Procedure

A copy of the survey was given to each resident 16 months after the first resident had moved into the facility. The residents were given 30 days to complete and return the survey.

Results

Our results can be divided into three general areas--time to adjust, sources of stress, and

importance of services.

Time to Adjust. The survey instrument asked the residents to indicate how long they felt it took them to satisfactorily adjust to their new environment when they moved to the retirement community. Only the responses of the residents who had lived in the community for one year or more were used to answer this question. The majority of the residents (59%) reported it took 30 days or less to adjust to their new environment. Seventeen percent indicated it took between 30 and 90 days to adjust, 12% said it took between 91 and 180 days, and 12% indicated their adjustment took longer than six months (N=169).

One of the most interesting findings in this area was that for women (N=71) there was a positive correlation between time to adjust and the number of frustrations in connection with the move, so that the more frustrations women reported the longer it took them to make the adjustment to the community. This relationship did not hold for men (N=56).

Sources of Stress. The survey instrument also asked the residents to indicate which aspect of the move they found the most stressful when they moved to

the retirement community. The questionnaire listed five sources of stress that may be encountered in connection with the move. Responses of all residents who answered this question, regardless of the length of time they had lived in the community, were included in the data analysis for this question. We found that the residents (N=190) reported a total of 285 stresses, an average of 1.5 stresses each. The greatest source of stress reported by the residents was the work and frustration of preparing for the move at 41%. This was followed by the loss of social bonds at 18%, the work and frustration encountered upon arrival at 16%, adjusting to the new environment at 13%, and making the final decision to move to the retirement community at 12%.

We next analyzed these sources of stress by age and gender. To do this, we divided the residents into three equal size groups after they had been ranked by age. The younger group contained ages 51 through 67, the middle group included ages 68 to 72, and ages 73 through 97 were identified as the older group. Again, one of the most interesting findings of our study fell in this area. What we found was that women in the

younger age group and men in the older age group reported more frustrations when preparing for the move than did the older women and younger men. There was no relationship between gender and age, however, for the other four sources of stress examined in this study.

Importance of Services. The third general area into which our results can be divided is the importance of services. The specific survey question asked the residents to use a scale where 1 equals very unimportant and 7 equals very important to give numerical answers which most accurately reflected the importance of a list of services. Responses of all residents who answered this question, regardless of their length of residence, were included in the data analysis for this question. We found that the residents reported that the dining room (N=216) was the most important service offered by the community. This was followed by maid service (N=216), the chapel (N=195), the library (N=207), transportation (N=213), and the coed beauty salon (N=163).

As we did with the sources of stress, we analyzed the data on the importance of services for gender and age differences. What was most striking about this

analysis was the amount of diversity we discovered both among the sexes and the age groups. In terms of gender differences, we found that women reported the chapel (N=189), the library (N=201), and the beauty salon (N=157) to be more important to them than did the men.

Equally interesting were the age differences that we discovered. We found a positive correlation between age and the value of the dining room (N=216) and maid services (N=216) such that older residents tended to value these services more than younger residents. We also discovered a negative correlation between age and the value of the chapel; younger residents tended to value this service more than the older residents. For the services of transportation, library, and beauty salon there was no relationship between age and value placed on the service.

Implications

One of the implications of this study is that age and gender are important variables to consider when conducting research on the elderly. Had we not included these variables in our research design, for example, we would not have discovered that younger women and older men were the most vulnerable subgroups

when stress was induced by preparing for the move. Perhaps the idea that some people are too young and too vigorous to move to a retirement home will have to be considered, and for older men, the assumption might possibly be made that the move to a retirement community spells loss of control and facing one's mortality.

Also, had we not considered age and gender in our analysis, we would not have discovered the tremendous amount of diversity that existed within our aging sample and within and between the genders in terms of time to adjust, sources of stress, and the importance of services. The fact that most residents reported it took 30 days or less to adjust while 12% indicated it took more than six months is evidence of diversity in terms of time to adjust. The fact that there was a positive correlation between time to adjust and the number of frustrations in connection with the move only for women is further evidence of diversity in adjustment. The finding that younger women and older men reported more stress when preparing for the move implies diversity in terms of sources of stress. We also saw diversity when we found that particular age

groups valued some services more or less than other age groups and women valued some services more than men. Perhaps, then, as our findings imply, it is a mistake to assume that age 65 and up constitutes a homogenous group; such a group actually represents many cohorts and at least two generations. Subsequent research, then, particularly in the area of relocation, might do well to begin considering some of the differences that exist in the elderly population.